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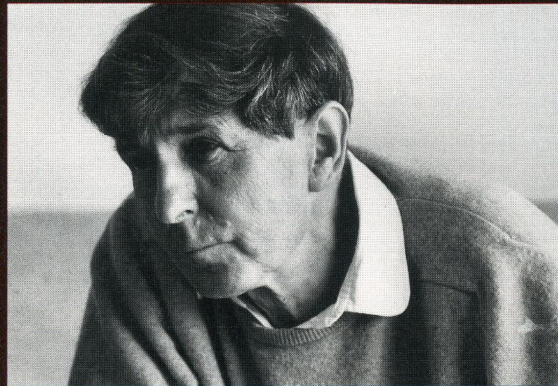


TIPPETT: KING PRIAM

CHAN 9406/7

CHANDOS

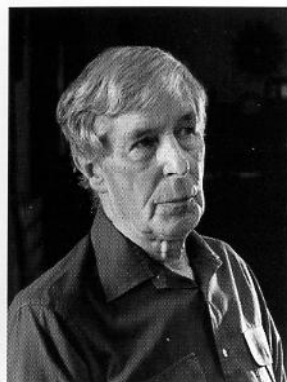
Chan 9406/7



Tippett
KING PRIAM
The London Sinfonietta
David Atherton

CHANDOS





Sir Michael Tippett
Jason Shenai

Sir Michael Tippett (b. 1905)

King Priam

Priam, King of Troy	Norman Bailey
Hecuba, his wife	Heather Harper
Hector, their eldest son	Thomas Allen
Andromache, Hector's wife	Felicity Palmer
Paris, Priam's second son	Philip Langridge
Helen, wife to Menelaus of Sparta	Yvonne Minton
Achilles, a Greek hero	Robert Tear
Patroclus, his friend	Stephen Roberts
Nurse	Ann Murray
Old Man	David Wilson-Johnson
Young Guard	Peter Hall
Hermes	Kenneth Bowen
Paris (as a boy)	Julian Saïpe
Serving Woman	Linda Hirst

London Sinfonietta Chorus

Clive Wearing chorus master

Timothy Walker guitar

London Sinfonietta

David Atherton

COMPACT DISC ONE

	Act I	43:39
1	Prelude	1:29
	Scene 1	
2	Hecuba What is it, Nurse?	3:44
3	Priam Old man of Troy, you're welcome	2:25
4	Hecuba Then am I no longer mother to this child	1:33
5	Priam A father and a King	1:53
6	Priam The Queen is right	1:18
7	First Interlude –	
	Nurse, Old Man Thus shall a story begin	2:52
	Scene 2	
8	1st Huntsman The bull is away over there	2:20
9	Paris They have taken my bull	1:58
10	Hector Father, he's a shepherd boy	1:49
11	Priam So I'd hoped it might be	5:03
12	Second Interlude –	
	Nurse, Young Guard, Old Man	4:41
	Ah, but life, life is a bitter charade	
	Scene 3	
13	Helen, Paris Ah, ah...	5:15
14	Hermes Divine go-between, that's who I am	2:11
15	Paris Lady Athene, if I honour you...	0:53
16	Paris Lady Hera, if I honour you...	2:07
17	Paris Aphrodite, if I honour you...	2:08

Act II **24:56**

	Scene 1	
18	Hector So you've given up fighting!	3:41
19	Priam So Trojans honour Menelaus...	1:23
20	First Interlude –	
	Old Man Hermes, Hermes, with the winged feet come quick!	1:33
	Scene 2	
21	Achilles O rich-soiled land	5:27
22	Achilles Why are you weeping, Patroclus?	4:56
23	Second Interlude –	
	Old Man O, O, what a threat to Troy	1:35
	Scene 3	
24	Hermes A hero in Achilles' armour...	1:23
25	Hector All Trojans, all fought bravely	4:58

TT 68:43

COMPACT DISC TWO

Act III 58:49

Scene 1

1	Serving Woman Lady Andromache, should we not light the fire?	4:51
2	Hecuba Daughter Andromache, you must go out...	2:14
3	Andromache Did you hear?	1:23
4	Helen Let her rave	4:40
5	Hecuba O that my ears should hear impiety so gross!	3:48
6	Andromache Now you shall go	1:47
7	First Interlude –	
	Serving Women No... No... No... We have it from the runner	1:40

Scene 2

8	Priam What is happening?	3:47
9	Young Guard A crime	4:06
10	Nurse The soul will answer from where the pain is quickest	5:27
11	Second Interlude	3:03

Scene 3

12	Achilles Priam! Here! What is this?	1:50
13	Priam I clasp your knees, Achilles	1:14
14	Achilles Old man, I am touched	3:36
15	Third Interlude –	4:34

Scene 4

16	Paris Where is my father, where is Priam?	1:13
17	Chorus Ah, ah! Ah, ah!	2:34
18	Chorus Ah, ha, ha, ha	1:43
19	Chorus Ah, ah!	5:19

TT 58:49

Sir Michael Tippett: King Priam

Throughout his creative career Michael Tippett has been absorbed by one theme above all others, 'the only truth I shall ever say'. It was summarized in the words near the close of his oratorio, *A Child of Our Time*: 'I would know my shadow and my light, so shall I at last be whole'; and the notion of self-knowledge as a prerequisite of the reconciliation essential to a full personality has never left him. The chosen metaphor for its expression in his first opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*, involves a couple who must discover themselves more fully as individuals before they are ready for a true union. In *The Knot Garden* a marriage has begun to disintegrate, and the over-mundane husband and over-imaginative wife must restore the balance in their personalities before they can renew the balance in their marriage. *The Ice Break* widens the metaphor to embrace the theme of East sundered from West, black from white, generation from generation. *New Year* asks, among much else, for reconciliation between our present and our past.

Tippett's second opera, *King Priam*, seems at first consideration an exception in the canon. For one thing, it does not offer an encouraging view of what can be achieved in marriage. For another, it turns away from

myths of Tippett's own making, presented in a contemporary setting, to Homer and the *Iliad*. An immediate consequence is a more distant, spare style replacing the lyrical profusion of *The Midsummer Marriage*, for Tippett was concerned to use fruitfully a tension between modern yet timeless attitudes and those particular to the Homeric world. 'If I had allowed myself to disappear completely into the Greek world', he wrote, 'then of course the relevance to our time might have been obscured, and the impact of the opera thereby impaired. If I had modernized everything Greek away, then the mysterious nature of time and memory and fate might have been more difficult to express.' Certain formalities seemed appropriate. Rather than having a chorus imitating ancient practice, or invoking it as Britten did in *The Rape of Lucretia*, Tippett achieves his effect by having dramatized interludes between scenes. In these, characters assume more abstract roles in order to discuss the moral problems that have been enacted. Rather than invite the audience to share in lyrical emotions, he presents emotions and then their consequences, the resulting choices. A more declamatory vocal style is suitable, together with more sharply contrasting groups in the

orchestra (wind and brass predominating over strings), and with this a method of construction that replaces the former easy profusion with contrasted blocks of music. There is in the whole opera a clarity and a directness in confronting major issues that, while using modern techniques, is truly Greek, from the heroic attitudes to the final tragic catharsis; and Tippett actually quotes the Aristotelian definition of tragedy as involving a purging through pity and terror.

Yet the subject of marriage and reconciliation is not far beneath the surface of the action. Paris, in the famous Judgement here re-enacted, is required to choose between three goddesses. Aphrodite (represented in the opera by Helen) is pure feminine beauty; Hera (Hector's wife Andromache) embodies the virtues of hearth and home; Athene (Paris's mother Hecuba) is the goddess of wisdom, of the mind. Few men achieve a marriage to the three goddesses in one woman; Paris is seduced by the naked carnality that is Helen's only role, and that 'stretches up to heaven', as she sings, but also 'reaches down to hell', destroying men and cities. Hecuba prays to Athene as wife to a King; Andromache prays to Hera for the home and children she gives Hector: Helen's prayer to Aphrodite is for lovers. The three men are slain, the marriages shattered by the war that Paris and Helen have brought about by fleeing, irresponsible

to everything but their passion, from Greece to Troy. But the true hero of the opera is Priam, as its title tells us. He has had to choose either death for his baby son Paris, in the first scene, or death for Troy; as King, he chooses to save his city, but as a father he finds his emotions touched when he encounters, many years later, the young man his child has become. He only finds reconciliation, strangely, when the death of his other son, Hector, brings him as a suppliant to Achilles's tent. Hector has been slain by Achilles in vengeance for the death of Patroclus; the Greek is touched by the old man clasping his knees, and allows him to take back the mutilated body. Their common grief has drawn them into a bond of understanding.

When Tippett declares the subject of the opera to be 'the mysterious nature of human choice', then, he is not merely saying that our decisions may have unlooked-for consequences. A stronger implication is that unless the fullest understanding and responsibility are brought to bear upon choice, it will be lightly made and perhaps contain seeds of disaster. And a prerequisite of that is full self-knowledge, of the shadow as well as the light.

For all the strength of the moral content, however, *Priam* is a drama, sharp and exciting in impact. It is not even necessary to have read the *Iliad* to follow the plot, though the

resonances of its great names will mean more to someone familiar with the story of Troy, as will the import of Priam being driven to Achilles's tent by the Greek symbolic feeling for the bodies of the dead (as Sophocles' Antigone was to be driven). The moments of high musical drama and colour are overwhelming: the charging rhythms of the bull-hunt that suddenly halt and freeze as the young hero is revealed as the son, Paris, whom Priam believed dead; the dancing, flickering patterns of the guitar as Achilles and Patroclus sit over their watch-fire conjuring pictures of their homeland; the trumpets that echo from far away, as if across the Styx, when Achilles calls on the shade of Patroclus for forgiveness; most memorably of all, perhaps, the scene at the end of Act 2, after Hector has slain Patroclus, when across the music there suddenly strikes a terrible ululation, transfixing them all as they recognize the war cry of Achilles. It is as horrifying as the silent approach of the Myrmidons in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: 'Look, Hector, how the sun begins to set.' This is the embodiment of Achilles, most brutal, dark and splendid of the Greeks: before him, even Hector is unmanned. Yet Achilles, too, comes to feel pity, as he did not believe he could. In some ways, the heart of the opera is in the quiet music as he sits with Priam in the darkness, and they discover mutual forgiveness.

Synopsis

Act 1

Hecuba, Queen to Priam, King of Troy, has been troubled by a dream; it is interpreted by an Old Man as revealing that her baby son Paris will be the cause of his father's death. Priam, torn between his duty as a king and his love as a father, decides to have the child killed. After the first Interlude, in which these issues are discussed, the scene changes to a hunting field, many years later. The bull being chased is suddenly rescued in an act of bravery by a beautiful young man; it is Paris, saved from death and brought up by shepherds. Priam now accepts Paris as his son together with the fate this means for Troy. In the second Interlude, the Old Man, Nurse and Young Guard reflect on life as 'a bitter charade', and recount how Paris has been driven from Troy by the marriage of Hector to Andromache. Paris returns, in the third scene, with Helen, stolen from her Greek husband Menelaus. Hermes, messenger of the gods, appears and enjoins Paris to choose between Athene, Hera and Aphrodite for his protectress: he must give an apple to the goddess of his choice. These goddesses represent also the three women in his life, his mother Hecuba, his brother's wife Andromache, and Helen. He chooses Helen by giving the apple to Aphrodite.

Act 2

The Greeks have laid siege to Troy so as to recover Helen. The city is weakened by the quarrels between Hector and Paris. After an Interlude, the scene shifts to the tent of Achilles, who sits sulking with his friend Patroclus over the theft of his girl and refusing to lead the Greeks into battle. Patroclus puts on Achilles' armour so as to dupe the Trojans into believing that it is Achilles himself who has returned to the battle; but Patroclus is slain by Hector, and this arouses Achilles to grief-stricken rage. At the moment of the Trojan's exultation, his war-cry is heard.

Act 3

The three women reflect upon their roles: Andromache and Hecuba reproach Helen, who justifies her nature as the embodiment of

woman as man most desires her. In the Interlude, the serving women, unnamed slaves, run frightened to and fro, sensing the disaster coming to the city. The death of Hector shatters Priam, but he acknowledges the responsibility thrust upon him and, after an instrumental interlude, goes to intercede with Achilles for the body of Hector. His request is granted and as the two men drink wine together each foretells the other's death: Achilles will be killed by Priam's son and Priam by Neoptolemus, Achilles' son. In the last Interlude, Hermes comes as messenger of death. Priam now withdraws into his own world, secluded from men and events. He takes leave of the three women, speaking gently to Helen; as he kneels at the altar, soldiers break in and Priam is slain by Neoptolemus.

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Sir Michael Tippett: König Priamos

Durch Michael Tippetts gesamtes Werk zieht sich ein Gedanke, den er gegen Ende seines Oratoriums *A Child Of Our Time* in den Worten zusammenfaßt: "Erkenne ich Dunkel und Licht in mir, werde ich schließlich ein Ganzes sein" – Ausdruck der Idee von der Selbsterkenntnis als Voraussetzung der für die Entwicklung einer vollkommenen Persönlichkeit unverzichtbaren inneren Harmonie. Seine erste Oper, *The Midsummer Marriage*, stellt in der für die Behandlung dieses Themas gewählten Metapher zwei Partner vor, die eine wirkliche Einheit erst bilden können, nachdem sie sich selbst erforscht haben. In *The Knot Garden* hat der Verfallsprozeß einer Ehe bereits begonnen; der borniert pragmatische Mann und die unbändig phantasievolle Frau bemühen sich um ihr seelisches Gleichgewicht als Voraussetzung für die Wiederfindung des Gleichgewichts in ihrer Ehe. *The Ice Break* erweitert die Metapher um das Thema der Widersprüche zwischen Ost und West, Schwarz und Weiß, sowie zwischen den Generationen. In *New Year* man sucht Versöhnung unserer Gegenwart mit unserer Vergangenheit.

In mancher Hinsicht nimmt Tippetts zweite Oper *König Priamos* eine Sonderstellung ein: Einerseits liefert sie keine optimistische

Beantwortung der Frage, was in der Ehe erreichbar ist; und andererseits wendet sie sich ab von der selbstgeschaffenen zeitgenössischen Fiktion und hin zu Homers *Ilias*. Daraus ergibt sich ein mehr auf Distanz gehender, sparsamer und die reiche Lyrik der *Midsummer Marriage* ablösender Stil – die Spannungen zwischen modernen, ja zeitlosen Verhaltensweisen und denen der homerischen Welt will Tippett fruchtbar machen: "Wenn ich mir vollständiges Aufgehen in der griechischen Antike erlauben würde, so wäre ja die Bedeutung für die heutige Zeit verdeckt und die Stoßkraft der Oper geschwächt worden. Hätte ich dagegen alles Griechische hinwegmodernisiert, wäre es mir wohl recht schwer gefallen, das mysteriöse Zusammenspiel von Zeit, Erinnerung und Schicksal darzustellen", schreibt er. Mit angemessenem Formalismus wird der Effekt des Chors im antiken Theater erzielt – nicht durch einfache Übernahme aus der griechischen Tragödie oder durch eine Anrufung wie bei Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, sondern durch Zwischenspiele, in denen die handelnden Personen in abstrahierte Rollen schlüpfen, um die vorher dargestellten moralischen Probleme zu diskutieren. Nicht zur Teilnahme an lyrischen Emotionen wird der Zuschauer aufgefordert,

sondern vielmehr mit den Emotionen und den aus ihnen sich ergebenden Entscheidungen konfrontiert. Dem entspricht ein recht deklamatorischer Gesangsstil, verbunden mit stark kontrastierenden Musik- und Orchesterblöcken (Holz- und Blechbläser überwiegen die Streicher), die den früheren leichtfließenden Strukturreichtum ablösen. Die direkte Gegenüberstellung der letzten Fragen menschlicher Existenz verleiht der Oper, trotz aller modernen Technik, durchaus griechische Klarheit und Unmittelbarkeit – von der Auffassung der Heroik bis zur schließlich tragischen Katharsis, getreu nach Aristoteles' Definition der Tragödie, die eine Auflösung der tragischen Verwicklung ohne Leid und Schrecken nicht zuläßt.

Dennoch werden die Probleme der Ehe und zwischenmenschlicher Versöhnung unter der Oberfläche der Handlung erkennbar in dem berühmten Urteil des Paris, seiner Wahl zwischen den drei Göttinnen Aphrodite (dargestellt von Helena) als Verkörperung vollkommener Schönheit, Hera (hier Hektors Frau Andromache) als der um Haus und Herd sich kümmernden Ehefrau und Athene (hier Paris' Mutter Hekuba) als Göttin des Geistes und der Weisheit. Nur selten gewinnt ein Mann durch die Heirat einer Frau die Vorzüge aller drei Göttinnen; Paris wird von Helenas nackter Sinnlichkeit verführt, mit der allein sie aufwarten kann – "Liebe dieser Art reckt sich zum Himmel, denn sie reicht in die Hölle

hinab" und vernichtet Menschen und Städte. Hekuba betet zu Athene als Frau eines Königs; Andromache betet zu Hera um die Kinder und ihr Heim; Helena bittet Aphrodite um Liebhaber. Die drei Männer werden erschlagen, die Ehen vom Krieg zerrüttet, den Paris und Helena durch ihre eigensinnige Flucht von Griechenland nach Troja ausgelöst haben.

Der eigentliche Held der Oper ist – dem Titel entsprechend – jedoch Priamos. In der ersten Szene hatte er zu entscheiden zwischen dem Tod seines Sohnes und der Vernichtung Trojas. Als König wählte er seine Stadt; doch als Vater wird er viele Jahre später von der Freude überwältigt, seinem Sohn zu begegnen, der inzwischen ein junger Mann ist. Er findet sein Gleichgewicht – merkwürdig genug – erst wieder, als der Tod seines älteren Sohnes Hektor ihm auferlegt, als Bittsteller zum Zelt des Achilles zu gehen. Hektor wurde von Achilles aus Rache für den Tod des Patroklos erschlagen. Von dem alten Mann, der die Arme um seine Knie schlingt, läßt sich der Grieche bewegen, ihm die verstümmelte Leiche zu geben. Ihre gemeinsame Trauer hat ein Band des Verständnisses zwischen ihnen geknüpft.

Wenn Tippett erklärt, das Thema der Oper sei "die mysteriöse Natur menschlicher Entscheidungen", so meint er damit nicht nur, daß unsere Entscheidungen zu unerwarteten Folgen führen können; vielmehr können leichthin getroffene, nicht auf vollkommenem

Verständnis und umfassender Verantwortung beruhende Entscheidungen Katastrophen herbeiführen. Voraussetzung für richtige Entscheidungen ist die Selbsterkenntnis – des Dunkels wie des Lichts.

Bei all seiner Moralität ist *König Priamos* dennoch ein Drama von vehementer und aufregender Stoßkraft. Die Kenntnis der *Ilias* ist zum Verständnis nicht notwendig, obwohl jemandem, der mit der Geschichte Trojas vertraut ist, die berühmten Namen mehr bedeuten werden, wie auch Priamos' Gang zum Zelt des Achilles, motiviert von demselben griechischen Ethos gegenüber den Toten, von dem auch Antigone getrieben wird.

Überwältigend sind die Augenblicke hoher musikalischer Dramatik und Farblichkeit, zum Beispiel die elektrisierenden Rhythmen der Stierjagd; die plötzlich und erstarrend abbrechen, als Priamos in Paris seinen totgeglaubten Sohn erkennt; die tanzenden, flimmernden Gitarrenklänge, wenn Achilles und Patroklos am Feuer sitzen und Bilder der Heimat heraufbeschwören; die weichen, wie vom fernen Styx kommenden Trompetenechos, wenn Achilles den Geist des Patroklos anruft und um Vergebung bittet; am denkwürdigsten jedoch die Szene am Ende des 2. Aktes, nachdem Hektor Patroklos erschlagen hat und durch die Musik plötzlich der alles erstarren lassende Kriegsruf Achilles dringt – ähnlich unheimlich wie die lautlose Annäherung von Achilles' Myrmidonen in Shakespeares *Tróilus*

und *Cressida*: "Schau, Hektor, wie die Sonne nun versinkt" – , mit dem dieser brutalste, dunkelste und unvergleichliche Greiche gemalt wird und vor dem selbst Hektor erbleicht. Doch auch Achilles ist – zu seinem eigenen Erstaunen – fähig zum Mitleiden: die ruhige Musik der Szene, in der Priamos und Achilles in der Dunkelheit beim Feuer sitzen und sich gegenseitig vergeben, ist gewissermaßen das Kernstück der Oper.

Inhaltsangabe

1. Akt

Hekuba, die Frau von Trojas König Priamos, wird durch einen Traum beunruhigt, dessen Deutung durch einen alten Mann besagt, daß ihr noch in der Wiege liegender Sohn Paris eines Tages den Tod seines Vaters verschulden wird. Priamos schwankt zwischen seinen Pflichten als König und seiner Vaterliebe – schließlich entscheidet er, das Kind töten zu lassen. Nach der Diskussion über diese Entscheidung im ersten Zwischenspiel wechselt die Szene um viele Jahre weiter zu einem Jagdgebiet. Der Stier, dem die Jagd gilt, wird durch die kühne Tat eines schönen jungen Mannes gerettet; es ist Paris, der von Schaffhirten vor dem Tode bewahrt und aufgezogen wurde. Priamos wird von Freude überwältigt und akzeptiert Paris als seinen Sohn und damit auch das unausweichliche Schicksal Trojas. Im zweiten Zwischenspiel reflektieren die handelnden

Personen über das Leben als bitteres Rätsel und erzählen, daß Paris wegen Hektors Ehe mit Andromache Troja verlassen hat. In der dritten Szene kehrt Paris mit der von ihrem griechischen Mann Menelaos geraubten Helena zurück. Der Götterbote Hermes gebietet Paris, zwischen Hera, Athene und seiner Beschützerin Aphrodite zu wählen – der Schönsten soll er einen Apfel geben. Die Göttinnen repräsentieren gleichzeitig die drei Frauengestalten in seinem Leben: Andromache, die Frau seines Bruders, Hektor, seine Mutter Hekuba und Helena. Er gibt Aphrodite den Apfel und wählt damit Helena.

2. Akt

Die Griechen belagern Troja unter dem Vorwand, Helena zurückzuholen. Die Stadt ist durch den Streit zwischen Hektor und Paris geschwächt. Nach einem Zwischenspiel wechselt die Szene zum Zeit des Achilles, der mit seinem Freund Patroklos den Raub seiner Geliebten beklagt und sich weigert, die Griechen in die Schlacht zu führen. Um die Trojaner zu täuschen und glauben zu lassen, Achilles sei in den Kampf zurückgekehrt, legt Patroklos dessen Rüstung an, wird aber von

Hektor erschlagen. In das Jubelgeschrei der Trojaner mengt sich der durchdringende Kriegsruf des Achilles.

3. Akt

Die drei Frauen denken über ihre Rollen nach – Andromache und Hekuba laden alle Schuld auf Helena, die sich damit verteidigt, die vollkommene Frau und Wunschvorstellung eines jeden Mannes zu sein. Im Zwischenspiel laufen die Sklavinnen aufgeregt durcheinander – sie spüren den nahen Untergang der Stadt. Hektors Tod erschüttert Priamos; er erkennt die auf ihm lastende Verantwortung und geht nach einem Instrumental-Zwischenspiel zu Achilles, um Hektors Leiche zu erbitten. Die Bitte wird ihm gewährt; die beiden Männer trinken zusammen; jeder prophezeit des anderen Tod. Im letzten Zwischenspiel kommt Hermes als Todesbote. Priamos zieht sich vor den Menschen und Ereignissen in seine eigene Welt zurück und nimmt Abschied von den drei Frauen, von Helena mit besonderer Milde. Während er vor dem Altar kniet, wird er von hereinstürmenden Soldaten getötet.

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Sir Michael Tippett: Le Roi Priam

Un thème dominant tous les autres a poursuivi Michael Tippett pendant toute sa carrière de compositeur, "la seule vérité que je dirai jamais". Il le résume en quelques mots proches de la fin de son oratorio *A Child of Our Time*: "Je veux connaître mon ombre et ma lumière; ainsi serai-je en mon entier." Et la pensée de la connaissance du soi, condition préalable de la réconciliation, elle-même essentielle à une personnalité complète, ne l'a jamais quitté. L'image choisie pour l'exprimer dans son premier opéra *The Midsummer Marriage* est celle d'un couple dont les deux protagonistes doivent se découvrir plus pleinement avant de réaliser une union véritable. Dans *The Knot Garden*, la dissociation d'un couple a commencé: le mari qui vit trop sur la terre, la femme qui vit trop dans les nuages doivent retrouver l'harmonie de leur propre personnalité avant de reconstruire celle de leur mariage. *The Ice Break* élargit l'image en y englobant le thème du divorce entre cultures, races et générations. En *New Year*, on cherche une réconciliation de notre présent avec notre passé.

Le second opéra de Tippett, *Le Roi Priam*, semble dans un sens s'écarter de la ligne générale. A part sa vue peu encourageante sur les aboutissements possibles du mariage, il

renonce à la création de mythes dans un contexte moderne pour se tourner vers Homère et l'Iliade. Aussitôt le style change: très lyrique dans *The Midsummer Marriage*, il devient plus dépouillé, plus distant. Tippett voulait en effet tirer un fructueux parti de la tension suscitée entre des manières de voir présentes, intemporalisées et celles propres au monde homérique. "Si je m'étais permis de disparaître complètement dans le monde grec, a-t-il écrit, le rapport avec notre temps aurait pu évidemment se trouver voilé et donc l'effet immédiat de l'opéra affaibli. Si j'avais transformé tout ce qui était grec en moderne, il eût été plus difficile peut-être d'exprimer le caractère mystérieux du temps, du souvenir, du destin." Certaines formes parurent indiquées. Au lieu d'un chœur à l'antique ou s'en réclamant comme le fait Benjamin Britten dans *The Rape of Lucretia*, Tippett insère entre les tableaux des intermèdes où le rôle des personnages se fait plus abstrait quand ils commentent les problèmes moraux qui viennent d'être joués. Et au lieu d'inviter les spectateurs à s'associer aux passions représentées, Tippett expose ces passions puis leurs conséquences qui sont les choix résultants: le style vocal se fait alors déclamatoire et l'orchestre y répond par des

groupes instrumentaux bien contrastés (vents et cuivres dominant les cordes), le tout joint à une structure qui remplace l'épanchement lyrique par des oppositions en blocs musicaux. Malgré le recours aux techniques modernes, il y a dans l'affrontement aux grands problèmes une clarté, une franchise proprement grecques, répandues sur tout l'opéra depuis les prises de position héroïques jusqu'à la tragique purification finale – et Tippett, en effet, cite la définition aristotélicienne de la tragédie, la catharsis par la terreur et la pitié.

Le thème du mariage et la réconciliation reste néanmoins très proche de l'action. Pâris, dans une nouvelle version du célèbre jugement, doit choisir entre trois déesses: Aphrodite (Hélène) qui est la pure beauté féminine; Héra (Andromaque, le femme de son frère Hector) qui représente les vertus domestiques: Athéna (Hécube, sa mère) qui est la déesse de la sagesse, de la raison. Peu d'hommes épousent ces trois divinités dans la même femme. Pâris est conquis par sensualité pure qui est l'unique fonction d'Hélène et qui, comme elle le dit, s'étend jusqu'aux cieux car elle atteint l'enfer, ce qui entraîne la destruction des hommes et des villes. Hécube, femme d'un roi, prie Athéna; Andromaque prie Héra pour le foyer et les enfants qu'elle donne à Hector; Hélène prie Aphrodite pour les amants. Les trois hommes trouveront la mort et les unions sont détruites dans la guerre déclenchée par la fuite égoïste d'Hélène et de

Pâris de Grèce en Troade. Mais, comme le dit le titre, le véritable héros de l'opéra est Priam. A lui aussi un choix a été imposé; la mort de son fils Pâris au berceau ou la mort de sa cité. Roi, il choisit de sauver sa ville. Mais père, il s'émeut quand il retrouve son fils devenu grand. Et la réconciliation ne survient pour lui, de façon saisissante, que lorsque la mort de son fils Hector le conduit, suppliant royal, à la tente d'Achille. Le héros grec, qui tua Hector pour venger Patrocle, est pris de pitié devant le vieil homme étreignant ses genoux; il lui accorde de ramener à Troie le corps mutilé de son fils. Entre les deux hommes rapprochés par une douleur commune, la compréhension se noue.

En nous disant que son opéra a pour sujet "the mysterious nature of human choice", le mystère du choix humain, Tippett ne songe pas seulement aux suites inconnues de nos choix. L'implication est plus vigoureuse: si le choix n'est pas assumé par la responsabilité la plus entière, sondé par la compréhension la plus totale, s'il est pris donc à la légère, il portera peut-être en lui les germes secrets d'une catastrophe. Or, il est indispensable, avant de faire ce choix, de se connaître parfaitement, l'ombre comme la lumière.

Si grande que soit la teneur spirituelle de l'opéra, *le Roi Priam* n'en est pas moins un drame vivant, direct, mordant, qui nous tient en haleine. Il n'est même pas nécessaire d'avoir lu l'Iliade pour le suivre; mais

évidemment quiconque connaît bien sa guerre de Troie appréciera mieux d'entendre ses grands noms résonner sur la scène, comme il comprendra mieux la démarche de Priam à la tente d'Achille, dictée par le respect rituel des anciens pour le corps d'un mort. Ainsi fera Antigone.

Les grands moments dramatiques de l'histoire sont extraordinairement empoignants: les rythmes de charge dans la chasse au taureau qui s'arrêtent net et se figent quand Priam découvre dans le jeune pâtre Pâris son fils qu'il croyait mort; les dessins dansants, vacillants de la guitare quand Achille et Patrocle, assis tous deux auprès du feu de camp, évoquent les images de la patrie; le faible écho de lointaines trompettes, comme de l'autre côté du Styx, quand Achille demande à l'ombre de Patrocle son pardon pour le retour du corps d'Hector; plus inoubliable peut-être, à la fin du second acte et à l'annonce de la mort de Patrocle, la terrible ululation qui transperce la musique, où tous, figés, reconnaissent le cri de guerre d'Achille. Ce cri, c'est Achille lui-même, sombre, brutal, splendide entre tous les Grecs, devant lequel même Hector est désarmé. Et pourtant Achille, lui aussi, fait connaissance avec la pitié, à sa grande surprise. De bien des manières, le cœur de l'opéra se trouve dans la sereine musique entre Achille et Priam quand, assis tous deux dans la nuit, ils découvrent ensemble le pardon.

Argument

Acte I

Un songe trouble Hécube, femme de Priam, roi de Troie. Un sage vieillard l'interprète; leur fils Pâris, un enfant au berceau, causera la mort de son père. Priam est déchiré entre son devoir royal et son amour paternel. Il se décide enfin à sacrifier son enfant. Après le premier intermède pendant lequel on entend le chœur (Vieillard, Nourrice, Jeune Garde) commenter la situation, la scène se transporte quelques années plus tard dans un champ où se livre une chasse au taureau. La bête est sauvée soudain par un magnifique adolescent. C'est Pâris, préservé de la mort et élevé par des bergers. Priam accepte alors son fils, malgré les conséquences pour Troie. Dans le second intermède, la chœur médite sur la vie, énigme amère, puis relate comment Pâris dut s'éloigner de Troie, chassé par le mariage de son frère Hector à Andromaque. Dans le troisième tableau, Pâris revient avec Hélène enlevée à son époux Ménélas. Hermès, le messager des dieux, intime à Pâris l'ordre de choisir entre trois déesses, Héra, Athéna et Aphrodite, en donnant une pomme à la plus belle; l'élue sera sa protectrice, les deux autres ses ennemies. Elles représentent les trois femmes dans sa vie; sa mère Hécube, Andromaque la femme de son frère, et Hélène. Pâris choisit Hélène en donnant la pomme à Aphrodite.

Acte II

Les Grecs font le siège de Troie pour venger le rapt et reprendre Hélène. La cité est affaiblie par la dissension entre Hector et Pâris. Après un intermède, la scène se transporte devant la tente d'Achille. Le héros grec, assis avec son compagnon et ami Patrocle, boude parce qu'Agamemnon lui a volé sa captive. Il refuse de mener les Grecs au combat. Patrocle revêt la cuirasse d'Achille afin de tromper les Troyens et leur faire croire qu'Achille a repris le combat. Patrocle est tué par Hector. La fureur d'Achille frappé de douleur se déchaîne et, au milieu de l'exultation troyenne, son cri de guerre retentit.

Acte III

Les trois femmes s'affrontent, chacune défendant son rôle. Andromaque et Hécube adressent de violents reproches à Hélène qui se justifie: incarnation de la femme éternelle,

c'est elle qui éveille en l'homme sa passion la plus forte et la plus fondamentale. Dans l'intermède, les servantes, esclaves anonymes, se préparent au sac de Troie. Hector est tué par Achille et Priam est brisé par sa mort. Mais il sait son devoir et, après un interlude, se rend au camp d'Achille pour réclamer le corps du mort. Achille accepte de le lui rendre. Ensemble les deux hommes boivent du vin et se prédisent leurs morts. Dans le dernier intermède, Hermès se présente en messager de la mort. Priam s'est déjà retiré du monde, loin des hommes et des événements. Les trois femmes viennent lui dire adieu; à la dernière, Hélène, il parle avec douceur. Puis il retourne s'agenouiller devant l'autel. Les soldats grecs conduits par Néoptolème, le fils d'Achille, font irruption. Priam est tué.

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Sir Michael Tippett: Il re Priamo

Durante tutta la sua carriera creativa, Michael Tippett è stato assorbito in particolar modo da un'idea, "l'unica sola verità che mai proclamerò." Essa è riassunta verso la fine del suo oratorio, *A Child of Our Time* (Un figlio dei nostri tempi), nelle parole: "Vorrei conoscere le mie ombre e le mie luci, in modo da poter infine essere completo"; e non lo ha mai abbandonato la convinzione che la conoscenza di se stesso sia necessaria alla pace interiore, fondamentale in una personalità ricca e matura. La metafora scelta per rappresentare tale idea nella sua prima opera, *The Midsummer Marriage* (Il matrimonio di mezza estate), descrive due amanti che devono riscoprire più approfonditamente se stessi; come individui prima di essere pronti ad una reale unione. In *The Knot Garden* (Il giardino del nodo), all'interno di un matrimonio in via di sfacelo, il marito troppo mondano e la moglie troppo fantasiosa devono ritrovare un equilibrio all'interno delle loro personalità prima di poter rinnovare l'equilibrio del loro matrimonio. *The Ice Break* (La rottura del ghiaccio) allarga la metafora ad abbracciare il tema delle divisioni fra Est e Ovest, fra bianchi e neri, fra generazione e generazione. *New Year* chiede, fra le molte altre cose, la riconciliazione fra il nostro presente e il nostro passato.

In un certo senso, la seconda opera di Tippett, *Il Re Priamo*, sembra a prima vista quasi un'eccezione alta regola. Tanto per cominciare, non presenta una veduta incoraggiante di quello che si può raggiungere col matrimonio. Inoltre, volta le spalle ai miti di creazione tippetiana, ambientati in situazioni contemporanee, a favore dell'*Iliade* di Omero. Immediata conseguenza di ciò, è uno stile più distante e rarefatto al posto della profusione lirica del *The Midsummer Marriage*; a Tippett stava a cuore sfruttare creativamente la tensione fragili atteggiamenti moderni, seppur fuori del tempo, e quelli tipici del mondo omerico. "Se mi fossi permesso di scomparire completamente nel mondo greco," scrisse, "allora certamente l'attinenza ai nostri tempi ne sarebbe stata oscurata, e l'incidenza dell'opera sarebbe stata indebolita. Se avessi rimodernizzato ogni personaggio greco, la natura misteriosa del tempo, della memoria, del fato sarebbe stata forse molto più difficile da esprimere." Alcune formalità sembravano ben appropriate. Invece di imitare l'uso antico del coro, o invece di invocare il coro come aveva fatto Britten ne *Il ratto di Lucrezia*, Tippett ottiene l'effetto desiderato inserendo fra le varie scene degli interludi drammatizzati; il essi i personaggi assumono dei ruoli più astratti per poter discutere i problemi morali via

rappresentati. Invece di invitare il pubblico a condividere le emozioni liriche, egli presenta le emozioni seguite dalle loro conseguenze, le risultanti scelte: ben si addice qua uno stile vocale più declamatorio, assieme ad un maggiore contrasto fra i vari gruppi orchestrali, coi legni e gli ottoni che predominano sugli archi, ed assieme anche ad un metodo costruttivo che sostituisce alla precedente facile profusione dei blocchi musicali contrastanti. In tutta quanta l'opera risaltano, nell'affrontare le tematiche fondamentali, una chiarezza ed una immediatezza infuse di tecniche moderne e tuttavia del tutto greche, dagli atteggiamenti eroici fino alla tragica catarsi finale; e in vero Tippett cita proprio la definizione aristotelica della tragedia, che implica una purificazione tramite la pietà ed il terrore.

Eppure il tema del matrimonio e della riconciliazione non si cela molto al di sotto della superficie dell'azione. A Paride, nel famoso Giudizio qua rievocato, viene chiesto di scegliere fra tre dee: Afrodite, rappresentata nell'opera da Elena, è pura femminilità e bellezza; Era, rappresentata dalla moglie di Ettore Andromaca, impersonifica le virtù del focolare domestico e della casa; Atena, rappresentata dalla madre di Paride Ecuba, è la dea della sapienza e della razionalità. Pochi sono quelli che sposano in una sola donna le tre dee: Paride viene sedotto da Elena, il cui unico ruolo è la nuda carnalità, che "s'innalza fino al cielo," come essa stessa canta, ma pure "s'inabissa fino agli inferi",

distruggendo uomini e città. Ecuba prega Atena come moglie di un re; Andromaca prega Era per la casa e per i figli che ha dato ad Ettore; e la preghiera di Elena ad Afrodite è per gli amanti. I tre uomini vengono uccisi, ed i loro matrimoni sono stroncati dalla guerra causata da Paride ed Elena che fuggono irresponsabilmente dalla Grecia fino a Troja. Ma, come ci dice il titolo stesso, è Priamo il vero eroe dell'opera. Nella prima scena costui deve scegliere fra la morte del figlioletto Paride e la distruzione di Troja; come re, sceglie di salvare la sua città, ma come padre, molti anni dopo, si lascia toccare nel vivo delle sue emozioni quando incontra il giovane che quel neonato è ormai divenuto. Egli, stranamente, trova pace solo quando la morte dell'altro su figlio, Ettore, lo porta alla tenda di Achille a supplicarne il corpo. Ettore è stato ucciso da Achille per vendicare la morte di Patroclo; il greco si commuove alla vista del vecchio re che gli abbraccia le ginocchia, e gli concede di riportare indietro il corpo mutilato del figlio. Il loro dolore comune li ha uniti in un legame di mutua comprensione.

Quindi, quando Tippett afferma che l'argomento dell'opera è "la natura misteriosa delle scelte umane", non vuole solo dire che le nostre decisioni possono avere conseguenze impreviste. La sua riflessione molto più profonda implica che se le nostre scelte non vengono dettate dalla massima introspezione e responsabilità, saranno superficiali e potranno contenere i semi del disastro. Ed una condizione

essenziale per tutto questo è proprio la conoscenza di se stesso, delle proprie, ombre oltre che delle luci.

Ma il *Priamo*, in funzione di tutta la forza del suo contenuto morale, è veramente un dramma, acuto e dall'impatto stimolante. Non è neppure necessario aver letto *Illiade* per seguire la trama, anche se gli echi dei suoi grandi nomi risuonano di un significato più ricco per chi abbia familiarità con la storia di Troia, ed anche se la visita di Priamo ed Achille assume un peso maggiore nel contesto della funzione simbolica dei corpi dei morti presso gli antichi, come per esempio nel caso di Antigone. I momenti di intenso dramma e colorito musicale sono travolgenti: i ritmi d'assalto alla caccia del toro, che all'improvviso si fermano e si fissano mentre il giovane eroe si rivela il figlio del re, Paride, creduto morto; le figurazioni guizzanti di danza sulla chitarra mentre Achille e Patroclo siedono presso il fuoco di guardia, ricreando le immagini della loro terra lontana; le trombe che riecheggiano dolcemente da lontano, quasi come da oltre lo Stige, quando Achille invoca il perdono presso l'ombra di Patroclo; e, forse più memorabile di tutte, la scena alla fine del secondo atto, dopo che Ettore ha ucciso Patroclo, quando un terribile ululato erompe all'improvviso nel mezzo della musica, pietrificando tutti i presenti, che riconoscono il grido di guerra di Achille. Esso è terrificante tanto quanto la silenziosa avanzata dei Mirmidoni nel *Trilo e Cressida* di Shakespeare:

"Guarda, Ettore, come il sole inizia a tramontare". Questa è la vera immagine di Achille, il più brutale, oscuro e splendido dei greci: di fronte ad esso perfino Ettore rimane disarmato. Eppure anche Achille giunge a provare pena, come mai egli stesso avrebbe creduto di poter fare; in certo qual modo, il cuore dell'opera sta in quella musica sommersa mentre egli siede al buio con Priamo, e i due scoprono il perdono reciproco.

La trama

Atto primo

Ecuba, regina e moglie di Priamo, re di Troia, è stata turbata da un sogno, che le viene spiegato da un vecchio; il suo piccolo figlioletto Paride sarà la causa della morte di suo padre. Priamo, lacerato dal dilemma fra il suo dovere di re ed il suo amore di padre, decide di uccidere il bambino. Dopo il primo Interludio, in cui vengono esaminati tali problemi, la scena si sposta ad una caccia campestre, molti anni dopo. Il toro cacciato viene improvvisamente salvato con un atto di grande coraggio da parte di un bellissimo giovane: si tratta di Paride, strappato alla morte ed educato da alcuni pastori. Ed ecco che ora Priamo accoglie Paride come figlio, assieme al destino inevitabile che ciò implica per Troia. Nel secondo Interludio il Vecchio, la Nutrice e una giovane Guardia riflettono "sull'amaro mistero" della vita, e raccontano come Paride

sia stato allontanato da Troia dal matrimonio di Ettore con Andromaca. Nella terza scena, ritorna Paride con Elena, sottratta al marito greco, Menelao. Appare Erme, messaggero degli dei, ed ingiunge a Paride di scegliere la sua protettrice fra Atena, Era ed Afrodite, consegnando una mela alla più bella delle tre. Queste dee rappresentano anche le tre donne della sua vita: la madre Ecuba, la cognata Andromaca, ed Elena. Egli, offrendo la mela ad Afrodite sceglie Elena.

Atto secondo

I Greci hanno posto l'assedio a Troia per riprendersi Elena. La città è indebolita dai litigi fra Ettore e Paride. Dopo un Interludio, la scena si sposta alla tenda di Achille, che siede triste assieme all'amico Patroclo lamentando il rapimento della sua amata e rifiutando di guidare i Greci in battaglia. Patroclo allora indossa l'armatura di Achille per far credere ai Troiani che Achille stesso sia tornato sul campo di battaglia; ma viene ucciso da Ettore, e tale dolore risveglia le ire funeste di Achille. Nel momento dell'esultanza dei Troiani si ode il suo grido di guerra.

Atto terzo

Le tre donne riflettono sui propri ruoli: Andromaca ed Ecuba rimproverano Elena, la quale giustifica la propria natura affermando di essere la donna dei sogni di ogni uomo. Nell'Interludio, le inservienti, delle schiave anonime, corrono di qua e di là presentando l'imminente distruzione della città. La morte di Ettore sconvolge Priamo, che si assume tutte le responsabilità e, dopo un Interludio strumentale, si avvia a supplicare Achille perché gli renda il corpo di Ettore. La sua richiesta viene accolta, e mentre i due bevono assieme del vino, si predicono a vicenda la morte: Achille sarà ucciso dal figlio di Priamo, questi da Neottolema, figlio di Achille. Nell'ultimo Interludio sopraggiunge Erme come messaggero di morte. A questo punto Priamo si ritira nel suo mondo privato, isolato dagli uomini e dalla storia. Prende congedo dalle tre donne, con parole gentili per Elena; e mentre s'inginocchia all'altare, irrompono dei soldati ed egli viene ucciso da Neottolema.

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CD1

ACT ONE
PRELUDE

1

Heralds with trumpets

Chorus (unseen)
Ah, ah, ah, etc.

(The heralds withdraw.)

Scene 1

(A point of light on a cradle. A nurse comes to quieten the child... Hecuba enters.)

2 Hecuba

What is it, Nurse?

Nurse

The child is restless and will not, will not be still.

Hecuba

Nor have I the peace of mind to mother him.

Where is King Priam?

(Priam comes.)

Priam

You've called me, Hecuba.
You are unlike yourself and strangely worried.
Is it the child?

Hecuba

O I am restless and unsure.
And now the baby has caught my mood.
My dream disturbs me.
What has come to Hecuba, the proud and fearless,
true wife for you in these troubled times?
For I am suddenly afraid.
I fear the meaning of my dream.

Priam

Our wise old man comes now to read it and advise. This mood of fear will pass. Though I'm yet young I've found that once the unknown is known, the way ahead is clear. You will be strong and sure again. You will see.

Hecuba

Your shining, shining confidence on which all Troy depends. It's good to hear it spoken.

Priam *(going to look in the cradle)*
Even the child responds.

(The Old Man enters.)

3

Old Man of Troy, you're welcome. The Queen is troubled by her dream. It will not leave her. Is there a hidden meaning there? That is her fear: fear of the unknown; for I cannot read the messages from dreams. We turn to you. Yours is the cool head where knowledge and advice are stored like honey in the comb. Wise Man, unravel the Queen's dream.

Old Man

The dream means that Paris, this child, will cause, as by an inexorable fate, his father's death. *(The shock is so great that time seems to stand still for a moment.)*

4 Hecuba

Then am I no longer mother to this child. Troy and the city's King are sacred. How could I have been so weak before? Now am I strong, am strong again; and I know I shall never fail you further.

As Priam's mate I bore already Hector, and can swear I shall bear Priam many sons, many sons. Ah, ah, harsh though it is, I say let this child be killed.

Old Man

What says King Priam?

Priam

5 A father and a King. *(he turns to the cradle)* So was I once a baby, born without choice. So might I, his father have been rejected by my parents to be killed. But then this child would not have been born.

He is born because I lived. Shall he die that I may live?

A father and a King.

O child who cannot choose to live or die, I choose for you.

(he turns from the cradle)

6

The Queen is right. Let the child be killed, be killed. *(He signs for a Young Guard to take the child)*

(Priam and Hecuba go out as the royal pair. The Young Guard goes to the cradle, picks up the child and goes.)

7 FIRST INTERLUDE

The Old Man and the Nurse, by a simple change of dress, or by a mask or a gesture, become, from time to time, a Chorus

Chorus:

Nurse, Old Man

Thus shall a story begin.
A child is born without choice.
From its parents alone it lives,
As now from its parents it dies.

Young Guard *(taking his place beside the others)*
That is a crime.

Nurse

Ah!

Old Man

What is a crime?

Young Guard

To kill one's own child is a crime.

Old Man

It may be a duty. Nature has many children for a man. Priam is young and lusty, Hecuba healthy. What means one child when the choice involves the whole city?

Young Guard

How could a young man know enough to dare to make such a choice?

Old Man

After the wise man read the dream. Priam knew all. He made the choice that a King would have to. Husband to Hecuba and King of Troy, how other could he act?

Nurse

There are things left out of your science. I had other apprehensions when the dream was read.

Chorus:

Young Guard, Old Man

Time, time alone will tell. We shall judge, shall judge from the story.

Nurse, Young Guard

For life is a story from birth to death.

Nurse, Young Guard, Old Man
Scene will change into scene before you.
Time rolling with each scene away.
Thus we follow the story.

Old Man
And the story of Priam shows that the
father-king
who made the bitter choice to destroy a son,
was favoured at first in home and land.
Hector grew to a fine lad,
and now there are other sons.
The city calm and flourishing;
occasion for hunting and the arts of peace.

Scene 2
(*Priam and Hector – as a youth – and a
few Huntsmen enter.*)

1st Huntsman
[8] The bull is away over there,
but the hounds will hold it.

Hector
Father, you stay here while I show you my skill.
(*Hector runs out. Priam and the men
watch his movements.*)

Priam
Troy will one day be proud of Hector.

1st Huntsman
Look there! He has called the hounds to heel
and will meet the bull head on.

2nd and 3rd Huntsmen
Give him a cheer.

1st, 2nd and 3rd Huntsmen
Ohé, ohé, ohé.

Priam (*still watching intently*)
The bull is swerving,
Hector, Hector, take care!

2nd Huntsman
But there's another boy there.

3rd Huntsman
Sprung from nowhere, ...

2nd Huntsman
Look there!

3rd Huntsman
... Jumped on the bull's back ...

1st Huntsman
... And is riding away with the hounds after
him.

Priam
Fetch that boy to me. All of you.
(*The Huntsmen run off.*)

Hector (*returning*)
How did that happen? Could you see?

Priam
There was a god or devil in that boy.
No boy unaided surpasses Hector.
(*again watching the chase*)
They have caught the bull and lost the
boy.
(*to Hector*)
Stay here while I go.
(*goes out after the Huntsmen*)

(*Paris, a beautiful boy, younger than
Hector, enters. Hector turns to see him.*)

Paris
[9] They have taken my bull.

Hector
We want it for the games.

Paris
He was my best friend.

Hector
You are friends with a bull!

Paris
I have no playmates.
I live alone with my shepherd father.

Hector
Did he give you the bull
and teach you that skill in riding?

Paris
I've always ridden so.
The bull is mine because I ride him.
On his back one day I'll ride out
into the wide world.

Hector
Where will you go?

Paris
I shall go first to Troy,
to take my place with the young heroes.

Hector
To do that you must learn to drive horses
and chariots; but I could teach you.

Paris
Who are you then?

Hector
I am from Troy.

Paris
Are you a young hero?

Hector
O yes.

Paris
And I will be a hero too.
Can I go back with you to Troy?

Hector
That depends on your father.

Paris
He will let me go, I know, if you'll take me.

Hector
Then we must ask my father.

Paris
Who is your father?

Hector
He comes now. He is King Priam.
(*Priam returns with the Huntsmen.
He looks fixedly at Paris.*)
[10] Father, he's a shepherd boy.
He wants to come to Troy to be a young
hero.
I should like to have him with us.

Priam
Beloved Hector, If you want him –
and Troy has need of heroes.
But does his father wish it?
He's not of age to go without consent.

Paris
O my father will consent.
That's what he promised.

Priam
Do you really choose to leave your father
and this country life?
To live in barracks
and be trained in fighting?

Paris
I love my father and my home.
But I want adventure.
I choose, I choose the life in Troy.
For I belong to Troy, I know.

Priam
What is your name, boy?

Paris
Paris.

(Priam's mind goes back to the scene by the cradle. The others draw apart and he muses alone.)

Priam

11 So I'd hoped it might be;
that accident or god reversed the choice,
sometime between my order to the guard
and its fulfilment.

So indeed it must be;
for my heart knows here is
my second son.

What now? ... What now?
I have a deepening anguish.
If it was a crime those years ago,
to crush the natural life,
the father's love,
because one is a King, ... what now? ...

What now?

Do I now with my own hands
that failed to kill a child,
kill the boy;
because he chooses with the certainty
of youth
to come to Troy
because he may fulfil the augury,
because he is my son?

I have a deepening anguish.
Where are the shadows from the past
who haunt my dreams,
(The Nurse, Young Guard, Old Man are present.)

who know there was a real dream of Hecuba's
that cannot be undreamt?
(to the Nurse)

You nursed the child for Hecuba,
too troubled by her dream.
(to the Old Man)

You read the dream's meaning
and foretold my fate.
(to the Young Guard)

You took the child to kill it,
but in sudden pity gave it to
a shepherd.
Actors indissolubly bound with me
to play a crucial scene.
Now it has come again,
now I must choose afresh,
now, in the moment of recognition,
now with Zeus's help,
now you shall see a less ignoble man.
For I accept the trick of fate
that saved my son,
and what he, Paris, chooses I uphold,
let it mean my death.

Old Man

Do you speak for Troy, as for yourself?

Priam

Yes! I speak for Troy as well.

(Priam and the Huntsmen leave with Hector and Paris.)

12 SECOND INTERLUDE

Chorus:

Nurse, Young Guard, Old Man

Ah, but life, life is a bitter charade.
(in varying ensemble)

We go from birth to death,
but nothing is plain.

Perhaps at the end a glimmering of sense,
at the end a residue of meaning.
(We shall see from the story.)

But on the way there, the way there,
ah, ... life, life is a bitter charade,
without and within a complex knot
that never unties,
though sometimes cut with a rending sound,
the orators drowned by a scream of pain.
Ah, ... life, life is a bitter charade.

Now the role will change from boy to
youth...

'The force that through the green fuse
drives the flower, ...

... boy to youth.

... ah, drives the flower?'

Body draws body to a destined bed.

Yet we act in a dream.

(Wedding guests from Troy enter.)

Ah, ... but life, life is a ...

... bitter charade.

Wedding Guests

There, look there! We could have guessed it.

Oh, look there! We could have guessed it.

Droning yourselves into a coma.

Too fussed with meanings and morals

to live for the moment like us.

And what you've missed in Troy!

Yes, Hector's sumptuous wedding to

Andromache.

The bride, pure and beautiful in white.

Very dignified, every inch a princess.

Hector in a green embroidered tunic
with golden buckles.

The band of young heroes on parade.

Hector the bravest of them all,

Hector, Troy's champion!

Yet a man for a home; a woman's ideal.

Young Guard

And how did young Paris take the wedding?

Wedding Guests

He did not like it at all.

The truth is, once they knew they

were brothers,

Hector and Paris never got on.

Upsetting to Priam, but it's only natural.

Old Man

And so?

Wedding Guests

So Paris has now left Troy,
scorning his father,
and sailed to Greece,
where Menelaus keeps open house
at Sparta with his wife,
daughter of Zeus
Queen ...
... Helen

13 **Helen, then Paris (from an inner room)**

Ah, ah, ah, ah, ...

... ah, ah, etc.

(Helen and Paris come from the inner room.)

Paris

Helen!

Helen

Paris.

Paris

Are you woman or witch,
that you enchant me so?

Helen

I am Helen.

Paris

And I am Paris: young and strong with desire
when you are near.

Helen

I must go.

Paris

Go?

Helen

To Menelaus.

Paris

Helen, after such love with me,
can you go now to lie with Menelaus?

Helen
He is my husband.

Paris
What does that mean:
you fear to refuse him though you've ceased
to love him?

Helen
He is my husband. I may not deny him.

Paris
Then I must share you? ... No!
You must choose, choose between us,
Helen: come with me to Troy or stay with him.
Which shall it be?

Helen
How can I choose?
I must stay with him ... or go with you.
I cannot tell.

Paris
If I'm forced to sail away,
will you come with me?

Helen
You will be forced to sail away at dawn.

Paris
At dawn! Forced? By whom?

Helen
Menelaus.

Paris
Then, Helen, will you come with me?
(*silence*)
Helen!

Helen
Paris.

Paris
Will you come with me?

Helen
If you fetch me, I will come.
(*she goes out*)

Paris
If I fetch her, she will come ...
Oh Helen, you leave me to the moment
so desired and feared ...
Carried on the wind of love ...
if I carry you away ... another's wife! ...
a city's Queen! ... Who will escape
the avenging war?
O Helen, Helen, can we choose that?
You will answer, Helen:
do we choose at all, when our divided bodies
rush together as the halves of one?
We love, ... we love. O Gods,
why give us bodies with such power of
love
If love's a crime?
Is there a choice at all? ...
Is there a choice at all?
Answer, answer, father Zeus, divine lover!
Answer!
(*Hermes appears*)

Hermes
Divine go-between, that's who I am:
Hermes the messenger.
I run errands for the Gods and Goddesses.
I bring a message from Zeus.
(*as Chorus*)
To Paris, the most beautiful man alive.
You are to choose between three Graces.
Athene, Hera, Aphrodite.
(*Hermes gives Paris the apple, who
takes it as in a dream.*)
You shall give this apple
to the most beautiful.
(*The Goddesses appear. All are young.*)

Paris
I dream, I dream ...
They are all beautiful.
how can I choose between them?

Hermes
Yet you must choose, by Zeus' command.

Paris
How shall I give the apple to one
and escape the wrath of the others?

Hermes
You will not escape.
That is the law of life.

Paris
What shall I do then?

Hermes
Go forward as a man must.
Ask what they offer you,
should you honour them?

Paris (*approaching Athene*)
Lady Athene, if I honour you,
what is my fate?

Athene
Handsome are you, Paris, and you are brave.
I will inspire you on the battlefield.
Troy will be grateful if you honour me.

Paris
You speak like my mother, Hecuba.
(*He turns away and crosses over towards
Hera.*)

Lady Hera, if I honour you,
what is my reward?

Hera
You are brave, Paris, and you are good.
You cannot live always on the battlefield.
I will give that warmth and trust

within the marriage bond
that is man's reward,
if you honour me.

Paris
You speak like my brother's wife,
Andromache.
(*He returns to Hermes.*)
They have nothing to offer.

Hermes
There is still a third.
(*Paris approaches Aphrodite.*)

Paris
Aphrodite, if I honour you,
what will you promise me? ...
Well? ... Will you not speak,
O Goddess of all love that is desire?

Aphrodite
Paris!

Paris (*involuntarily*)
Helen!

Aphrodite
Paris!

Paris
O Aphrodite, shall I honour you?

Hera
Stay, Paris, stay.
For if you steal another's wife,
then I will curse you.

Athene
Consider Sparta's hurt pride.
If you dishonour Hera,
there will come war that pities no man.

Aphrodite
Paris.

(Paris gives Aphrodite the apple.)

Athene, Hera
Accursed! Accursed!

Paris
You are phantoms ...
I ...

Athene, Hera
Accursed! ...

Paris
... will fetch Helen, ...

Athene, Hera
Accursed!

Paris
... and she will come.
To Troy!

(Paris rushes out. The Goddesses disappear.)

Hermes
To Troy!

ACT TWO

Scene 1

(Hector in armour upon the walls of Troy, with Paris, unarmed.)

Hector
[18] So you've given up fighting!
I'm not surprised.
You're mad about women, you pretty boy;
and for myself, I wish you'd never lived.
What can the Greeks think we are,
when the second son of Troy,
Prince handsome, Paris, turns coward?
Is really this the man
who stole a wife from Menelaus?
You had a chance, an hour back

in battle with the avenging Greeks,
to meet the husband face to face.
You failed it, as you did at Sparta;
turned the back and ran away.
Where to? What for? ...
To go to Helen!

Paris
Hector, you may be right to call me
names.
Yet I wish you were not so like
a living hammer.
You tire me.
And once for all my good looks
are my birthright,
to be envied, not despised.
I ran away from Menelaus, I know;
and Helen is angry.
But I fight as well as any Trojan
after you.

Hector
Then fight! ... or must we wait
till Helen taunts you,
you woman-struck seducer?

(Priam enters.)

Priam
Stop wrangling, sons!
Let the Greeks quarrel, but not Troy.
I chide as father and command as King.
The camp of Greeks is split wide open:
wrath of Achilles against King Agamemnon
for a girl.

So sharp the quarrel, Achilles has now
drawn apart with all his men
and will not fight.
Troy should instantly attack.

Hector
Agreed. And would my brother fight,
we'd drive the Greeks into the sea.

Priam
Go, Paris, now and arm.
Hector will wait here.

(Paris goes.)

Hector
I tell you, father, but I'm filled with shame.
He may be man enough to man a woman –
his good looks see to that –
but he's not man enough to fight.
He ran away from Menelaus
there in front of all.
I wish you'd never got him,
or had strangled him at birth.

Priam
Calm yourself, Hector,
those are words I will not hear.
We need now every son I have.
Turn your anger to the Greeks,
let Paris be.

Hector
Do you reproach me that I love the Greeks,
Troy's enemies? O father!
But Menelaus, enemy, commands more honour
than Paris, brother.
Where is he now?
I say no more.
(he strides off)

Chorus *(in the distance)*
War! War! War! War! War!

Priam
[19] So Trojans honour Menelaus more than
Paris.

As many Greeks set Hector now
above Achilles.
Do I pretend?
O vain to vex the mind in time of war.
Vital alone that Paris learns to fight

before Achilles regains his manhood.
(calling)

Paris! Paris!

(Paris comes in armour.)

Paris
Has Hector gone already?
Yet I'm swift enough to catch him.
(goes off, running)

Chorus *(in the distance)*
War! War! War! War! ...

Priam
My sons united! Let them be ruthless! ...

Chorus
... War! War!

Priam
... But O, Apollo, bring beloved Hector
back to me triumphant,
and may the Greeks stay broken.

FIRST INTERLUDE

Chorus *(in the distance)*
War! War!

Old Man
[20] Hermes! Hermes, with the winged feet
come quick!

(Hermes comes.)

Hermes
Old phantom tied to Troy,
what d'you need from the god
who's tied to nothing?

Old Man
When I first knew the avenging Greeks
would come,
Agamemnon and dazzling Achilles,
my heart failed me.

Now my heart exults.
Take me, Hermes, through the Greek camp,
to spy into that tent and gloat for Troy
upon Achilles sulking.

Hermes

Gloat not too soon.
Dazzling Achilles has a heart
that one man reaches.
You shall truly see into that tent,
when we have crossed the plain,
deaf to the din of battle.

(They cross the plain towards the Greek ships.)

Chorus

War! War! etc.

Scene 2

(Achilles in the tent with Patroclus.)

Achilles *(accompanying himself on a guitar)*

[21] O rich-soiled land,
O land of Phthia,
where we grew to manhood,
you and I, Patroclus,
Shall we tread,
after the war,
the homeland again?
O there still lives my father,
with Neoptolemus, my son.
You loved him, Patroclus.
Shall we kiss,
after the war,
my tall son again?
[22] Why are you weeping, Patroclus,
like a little girl needing her nurse?

Patroclus

Your song made me weep;
to think of your father, our home
and your son.

Achilles

Forget the song. It was sad.

Patroclus

O I wept too for our comrades
here before Troy,
those who are wounded or dead
and for the waste of your manhood
in this war.

Achilles

Do not provoke me, Patroclus.

Patroclus

Hard-hearted Achilles,
from your insensate pride
the Greeks will soon go down in defeat.

Achilles

Aha! So they now see
what it is to misuse me.
When we fought against Thebe,
I was the first to enter the town.
I killed Andromache's father with all his sons.
I was given a girl as my prize
till Agamenon stole her (no other word)
and the craven Greeks applauded.
Is that fair dealings for Achilles?

Patroclus

You live for your quarrel.
Soon men may forget you can fight.
'Is Achilles really a hero', they'll say.

Achilles

Patroclus, they would not dare.
Look on that shining armour, bronze and
silver
which I keep ready till the Greeks
come begging to Achilles, as they will.
They cannot take Troy without me.

Chorus *(in the distance)*

War! War!

Patroclus

They may never take Troy.
Hector has reached our ships,
and if he burns them,
we may never see Greece again.

Achilles

Ah no! A check to the Greeks,
but not defeat.

Chorus *(in the distance)*

War! War!

Achilles

The danger is grave, ...

Chorus

... War!

Achilles

... yet I cannot give way.

Patroclus

Then let your armour go to fight.

Achilles

Meaning?

Patroclus

I am not you, Achilles,
but disguise me in your shining armour,
set me in your chariot with the immortal
horses,
I shall be you in all but body,
and under your plume (though you stay here)
can drive back the Trojans across the plain.

Achilles

Patroclus, you shall.
The scheme is worthy of my fertile brain.
Arm yourself, Patroclus, now as me.

*(Achilles helps Patroclus put on the
armour, then looks out of the tent for a
moment.)*

Chorus *(in the distance)*

War! War! War!

Achilles

Hector has fired the ships.
We act in the nick of time.
More than my armour, I'll lend you strength,
shouting my war-cry when the
moment comes.
You will drive all before you.
But go no further than the open plain.
I must be first to enter Troy.
*(goes to a chest to take out a silver cup
to make a libation to Zeus. They come out of
the tent.)*
All-powerful Zeus, I pray
that Patroclus may drive off the Trojans.
And come back safe to me here.
(he pours the libation)

Patroclus

Achilles, dear Lord Achilles, good-bye.

Achilles

Much loved Patroclus, good-bye.

[23] **SECOND INTERLUDE**

Old Man

O, O, what a threat to Troy.
Hermes, Hermes, what's to be done?

Hermes

Why ask me? I am not tied to Troy.
(as Chorus)
The gods rejoice when a hero like Achilles
chooses at last to redeem his virtue.

Old Man

I have no life beyond the bounds of Troy.
Help from the gods means help for Troy.
Return, Hermes, now at once
and bring the news to Priam.

Chorus

Hermes

The messenger is instantaneous
when the news is feared.
Priam will have guessed.
But yet, since you ask, I will go again
across the field of battle.

Chorus (*in the distance*)
War! War! etc.

Scene 3

(*Priam appears on the walls of Troy.*
*Hermes enters as a messenger, short of
breath from running.*)

Hermes

[24] A hero in Achilles' armour ...
perhaps Patroclus ...
rushed headlong from the ships
driving all before him.

Priam

So had I feared. It is Patroclus.
He alone could touch Achilles' heart.

Hermes

But Hector and Paris have rallied all your sons,
and Hector fights Patroclus man to man.

Paris (*entering*)

Father, have you heard the news?

Priam

That Hector fights Patroclus,
while you run back!

Paris

O, but Hector has already killed him.
Stripped the body. You shall see
Hector come resplendent in Achilles' armour.

(*Hector enters in Achilles' armour.*
Hermes has gone.)

Hector

[25] All Trojans, all fought bravely and together
till Achilles sent Patroclus into battle.
but with Apollo's help I, Hector,
killed Achilles' comrade and wear Achilles'
armour now as mine.
Father Priam, and you too, brother Paris,
before I go to greet Andromache
and kiss my son,
let us give thanks to Zeus.

Hector, Priam, Paris (*variously*)

O Zeus, King of all gods and goddesses,
high on Olympus

You have bowed your head for death
to the Greek hero, to Patroclus,
glorious victory to Hector and to Troy.
And, O Apollo, who fights for us,
when the goddesses and gods besiege

Zeus' ear,
speak first and loudest to ensure
the Olympian head bows once again
to uphold our walls,
and twice to destroy their ships.

(*Achilles appears before the tent to deliver
his war-cry. Hector, Priam and Paris
stand motionless, Hector as though transfixed.*)

Achilles (*echoed by Chorus*)

Oi, o, o, o, oi, oi, oi, etc.

Old Man (*between the tent and the walls,
gloating over the naked body of Patroclus*)
Achilles' war-cry!

Achilles, Chorus

Oi, o, o, o, oi, oi, etc.

Priam

O Hector!

Old Man

O Troy!

Achilles, Chorus

Oi, o, o, o, oi, oi, oi, etc.

CD2

ACT THREE

Scene 1

(*Andromache alone ... A Serving Woman
comes. Other Serving Women wait with a
cauldron.*)

Serving Woman

[1] Lady Andromache, should we not light the
fire?

Andromache

Yes, Prince Hector will want his bath
the moment he comes from fighting.
(*The Serving Women go.*)

Do I deceive myself?
Ah, there is foreboding in the heart
and in the home
as on the day Achilles killed my father
and my brothers.
Was that not enough that now today
he wants my husband?
Husbands are worth more than comrades,
yet Achilles claims my Hector
for Patroclus; death for death;
in which equation the most brutal wins.
Rouse Achilles, he becomes a brute insatiate.
Out of range of human frailty or human pity.
Hector remains to the end ...
... to the end, ah, ah! ... but a man.
Ah, my love is open,
ah, while I mask my fear.

Hecuba (*entering*)

[2] Daughter Andromache,
you must go out now on the walls
to plead with Hector to come inside the city;
for he is there alone to fight Achilles.

Deaf to Priam, he will attend to you.
Hector must be brought within
for the sake of Troy.

Andromache

For the sake of Troy!
O gods, is there no other sake?
What of Hector my husband?
What of Hector our son's father?
Intolerable!
I will not beg my husband
from the walls of Troy.
My place is here in my home.

Hecuba

And what will be your home if Troy is taken?
When Hector and all our men are dead,
you will be given, stubborn as you are,
as slave to a Greek.
That is the price of pride
that will not appeal to Hector
in a public street.

Andromache

Are you not stubborn too?
Go now to your husband, to Priam,
and beg him deliver Helen
to the avenging Greeks.
Then Troy and Hector will be safe
on the instant.

Hecuba

Daughter, you are a fool.
No war is fought for a woman.
If, because of Helen,
the Greeks landed from their thousand ships,
it is Troy they want, not Helen.
(*Helen enters.*)

Andromache

[3] Did you hear?
The war is not for you at all.
You are wanted neither here nor there.

Helen

Your words are meaningless to me, if bitter.
My husband, Paris, wishes me to visit you.
He says –

Andromache

'My husband, Paris', – Listen to that!
Your husband Menelaus.
That is where you belong.
What of your marriage vows to Menelaus?
Did you not feel the sacred ties of home?
O but you cannot.
A wife is other than a whore.
Not love drew you to Paris, but lust.
Where did he learn his lover's tricks?
From other whores before you.

Hecuba

Control yourself, Andromache.
Insults are out of place.

Andromache

Let me finish!
Go back to Greece, adulteress,
and let this war be stopped.

Hecuba

It will not stop.
Calm yourself and know your duty.

Helen

4 Let her rave. I, Helen, am untouched.
She cannot know me, what I am.
Once as I came along the walls,
the old men spoke of me, for so
I heard:
'No wonder Greeks and Trojans go to war
for such a woman.'
And they spoke well,
For I am Zeus' daughter,
conceived when the great wings
beat above Leda.
Women like you, wives and mothers

cannot know

what men may feel with me.
You talk of lust and whoring;
your words glance off such truth of love,
whose tempest carried Ganymede into the sky.
What, what, what can it be,
that throbs, throbs in every nerve,
beats, beats in the blood and bone,
down through the feet into the earth,
then echoed by the stars?
Intolerable desire, burning ecstasy.
All prices paid, all honour lost
in this bewilderment
Immortal, incommensurable
Love such as this stretches up to heaven,
for it reaches down to hell.

Hecuba

5 O that my ears should hear impiety
so gross!
Must Troy become a burning hell
to salve your vanity?
Why was I once so weakened by a dream?
Had I but smothered Paris at birth,
you would not be here in Troy.

*(Hecuba and Helen stare at one another
as they realize the gulf opening between
them. Hecuba turns away.)*

Andromache

O Hector, our few years of home
end in a cruel, bitter fate unwilling by us.
Husband, take my loving with you to the
grave.

Hecuba

Woman to Goddess, I to you, Athene, ...

Andromache

Woman to Goddess, I to you, O Hera, ...

Hecuba

... woman, I to you, Athene, ...

Helen

Woman to Goddess, I to Aphrodite, ...

Hecuba

... Athene, Athene, ...

Andromache

... O Hera, ...

Hecuba

... pray for strength
that heroes may endure, the city stand.

Andromache

... pray for wives, for wives and husbands,
and the home where children grow.

Helen

... pray for lovers, lovers,
and the divine madness ...
... of insatiable desire.

Hecuba

And to my man, King Priam,
King Priam of towered Troy, ...

Andromache

And to my man, horse-taming Hector,
horse-taming Hector with the flashing
plume,

Helen

And to my man, beautiful Paris,
Paris, envied of all,
beautiful Paris, envied of all, ...

Hecuba, Andromache, Helen

... grant balm of comfort ...

Hecuba

... from the steadfast mate.

Andromache

... that his life was pure.

Helen

... that he lay with Helen.

Hecuba, Andromache, Helen

For death, for death draws near.
Goddess to me, woman,
grant, grant but this!

Andromache

6 Now you shall go.
I have forewarning from within,
quicker than the fastest runner running here.
Hector is dead.
Now you shall go.

Hecuba

O Troy, O Priam.

*(Hecuba goes ... Helen and Andromache
look at each other ... before Helen goes.)*

Serving Woman (coming to Andromache)

The bath is hot. Will the Lord Hector come?

Andromache

Yes ... Yes ... Yes.
(she goes)

7 FIRST INTERLUDE

Chorus:

Serving Women

No ... No ... No.
We have it from the runner,
who has reached the house.
We always know. Yet who are we?
Not the names that figure in the drama.
Unnamed. Slaves. (Yes.) Slaves.
To whom the fate of towered Troy
is but a change of masters.
What else? Rape! Death!
Are these Greek or Trojan?
(they laugh)
Yet we could tell the story too,

the pathetic story of our masters.
Viewed from the corridor.

Chorus (*in the distance*)
Ah! Ah! Ah!

Serving Women

All the commotion now.
Would you know what that is? News.
News of Hector's shocking death
spreads like plague through Troy,
from the slave to the heroes, Priam's sons,
and to the Queen.
Only King Priam does not know.
For who shall tell him?
This news may break his heart
or turn his mind.
Troy will crumble.
Who will tell him, as he rages,
rages, in an inner room?
Look! There! He comes.

(*The Serving Women go off as Priam
is seen alone.*)

Chorus (*in the distance*)
Ah! Ah!

Scene 2

Priam (*alone*)
What is happening?
Am I no longer King?
Forced from the walls by my people.
Locked in my room.
Hecuba refusing to speak.
Something is known that I have not been told.
O Gods! Let me out! Let me out!

Chorus (*in the distance*)
O-i-o-o. O-i-o-o.

Paris (*without*)
Unhand me, mother Hecuba.

I will see him.
(*enters*)
Father ...

Priam
Son.

Paris
... Prepare yourself, for you must know.

Priam
Yes, I must know.

Paris
All are afraid,
so I have come to tell you.

Priam
What?

Paris
Your first and dearest son,
the hero Hector, ...

Priam
Ah!

Paris
... Achilles has killed him
and shamefully misused him.

Priam
Say that again.

Paris
Achilles has killed him
and shamefully misused him.

Priam
And you have dared to come and tell me.
Courageous to tell a stricken father truth,
afraid to fight.
Hector was a hero. You're but
a playboy.
Why did you not kill Patroclus?
Why did you not fight Achilles?

O, I could have spared you well for Hector;
for Hector my son.
Are you my son? No. Or if you are,
would that I had strangled you at birth
as the Old Man told me.

Paris
What horror! What injustice!
You are mad for grief.
I am your son. I am no coward.
You will not see me more
till I have killed Achilles
and avenged my brother.
(*rushes off*)

Priam (*moaning*)
Oh ... Oh ... Oh ... Oh.
A father and a King.
My death they said, but never Hector's.
Had they said Hector's,
I would have killed the other in the cradle.
O yes. I would. No doubt of it.

(*Young Guard and Old Man appear.*)

Chorus
Young Guard
A crime.

Old Man
A duty.

Priam
Phantoms! Phantoms from the fatal hour.
Is not the present harsh enough
that you should come to mock me from the
past?

Young Guard
Think on the present then.
What have you done to your son, Paris, now?

Priam
I have no son Paris.

I had a son, Hector. But he is dead.
O Gods!

Young Guard
You engendered Paris.
That cannot be shuffled off.

Priam
Let him avenge his brother then.

Young Guard
What is this vengeance? Recount.
Who killed Patroclus?

Priam
Great Hector, defending the city.

Young Guard
Who avenged Patroclus, killing Hector?

Priam
Barbaric Achilles. Curse him!

Young Guard
Who kills Achilles?

Priam
Paris, my son.

Young Guard
Who will kill Paris?

Priam
O Gods!

Old Man, distant Chorus
Agamemnon, Agamemnon.

Young Guard
What then is this vengeance that you want?

Priam
I do not want these deaths.
I want my own.
There was no truth in what the Old Man said.
O bitter disillusion!
Twisted around his finger,

had he no pity for a young man's
ignorance?
(to the Old Man)
Your reading of the dream was false.

Old Man
No.

Priam
Hector's death, not mine.

Old Man
No.

Priam
You told me lies.

Old Man
I told you truth so far I knew it.

Priam (turning away)
Why, why, why,
should this truth entrap us?
Toys, dupes, decoys of fate.
Never, never, never masters in the house.
(to the Old Man)
Why? Answer. Why?

Nurse (appearing)
The soul will answer from where the pain
is quickest.

Priam
Where the pain is quickest.
O Hector, my son, my son!

Nurse
Where did Hector's death begin?

Priam
Where did Hector's death begin?
Not at conception, for I loved my wife
and loved my child.
His death began at that fatal flaw of pity
(pointing to the Young Guard)

that you sensed in me.
I should have been hard like Hecuba.
Like this old man.
Then Hector would be here.

Nurse
One son to live only by another's death.
Is that the law of life you favour?

Priam
I favour nothing.
But I answer yes. Yes. Yes.

Nurse
Listen to your soul's echo.

Chorus (in the distance)
No, No, No.

Priam
These things are tricks.
I will hear no more.
I curse my parents that they got me.
I curse this life that has no meaning.
I curse my soul that will not let me rest.
Who dares to judge Priam, King of Troy?
Who dares to judge Priam, father of Hector,
father, and of that other son?
None would dare judge me
If my own soul were still.
Therefore I curse the soul.
And I curse you phantoms.
O, O, I curse, I curse!
(he sinks to the ground)

Young Guard, Old Man
Lie there and judge yourself ...

Young Guard
... father ...

Old Man
... and King!

Nurse
Measure him time with mercy.

11 SECOND INTERLUDE

(The figures of Priam and the chorus
fade away, and darkness is left, and
moving shadows. A point of light grows.)

Scene 3
(Achilles at night in his tent. The corpse
of Hector is covered by a cloth. Achilles
sits brooding over the body. Priam enters.)

Achilles (springing up)
Priam! Here! What is this?
(raises his head to call)

Priam
Do not call the guards.
I am unarmed, alone.
Led by Hermes I am here;
an old man bringing gifts.
(he looks towards the corpse of Hector
as though unable to control his trembling
need to touch it)
A father come to ransom the body of his son.

Achilles
Then you are mad, old man?
Were you not a father, old as my own father,
I would kill you now.
There is indeed the body of Hector.
But cruel as I am,
I will not force you to uncover it.
It is mutilated shamefully,
and by my own hands.
For this flesh is Hector's, and not,
and not, and never
the living flesh of him I loved,
the gentle prince, Patroclus.
(he sits down sobbing)

(Priam in a swift movement kneels before
Achilles, clasps Achilles' knees, and
kisses his hands.)

Priam
I clasp your knees, Achilles,
and kiss your terrible, man-slaying hands.
Think on your father, Achilles,
the lone old man in Greece,
waiting for you to return.
At least he still has you,
while I with Hector dead, have nothing.
Think on your father,
remember the gods,
be merciful before the dawn.
For I have done what no father did before:
kissed the hands of him who killed my
son.

(Achilles takes Priam's hands off his knees
and lifts Priam's head.)

Achilles
Old man, I am touched.
Brutal Achilles has felt pity!
You shall have the body to take back to Troy.
(standing up to pray)
Patroclus, do not be angry
when you hear in the dead lands
that I gave Priam Hector's body back.
You shall have your proper share
of the princely ransom I shall ask.
Farewell!
(he draws a curtain to shut the corpse from
view)
Come, old father,
you are tired, you shall stay here the night.
Let us drink wine.
I drink to my death,
the death of dazzling Achilles.
Since I failed Patroclus,
I want only my death.

Priam
I go to a different death, Achilles.

Achilles
I shall die first, and in battle.
Which of the Trojans will kill me?
Tell me that.

Priam
Paris will kill you, Paris, my son.

Achilles
And who will kill you at the altar,
King Priam?
My goddess mother told me.
So I will tell you.
Neoptolemus will kill you at the altar.
Neoptolemus, my son.

THIRD INTERLUDE

(Hermes enters as messenger of death.)

Hermes
[15] I come as messenger of death.
For the story will soon end.
A timeless music played in time.
(to the spectators)
Do not imagine all the secrets of life
can be known from a story.
O but feel the pity and the terror
as Priam dies.
He already breathes an air
as from another planet.
The world where he is going,
where he has gone,
cannot communicate itself through him
(he will speak only to Helen in the end)
– but through the timeless music
(turning back to the altar, as Chorus)
O divine music,
O stream of sound,
in which the states of soul

flow, surfacing and drowning,
while we sit watching from the bank
the mirrored, mirrored world within,
for 'Mirror upon mirror mirrored
is all the show'.
O divine music,
melt our hearts, renew our love.
(he goes)

Scene 4

*Before an altar.
(Paris, dishevelled from fighting.)*

Paris
[16] Where is my father, where is Priam?

(Priam enters slowly.)

Priam
What is it now?

Paris
I have killed Achilles and avenged Hector.
Embrace me, father.

Priam
You ask too much.

Paris
Well then, I offer, for you are still my father:
I will take you and Helen;
leave the doomed city to found another Troy.

Priam
You are not the founding sort.
Nor will I go.
Stay to defend me till I am ready.
Keep all away.

Chorus (in the distance)
[17] Ah, ah! Ah, ah!

Hecuba (entering and meeting Paris)
The Greeks are in the city.

All is lost.
Why are you not in the fight?

Paris
I obey my father
to defend him while he prays.

Hecuba
Too late for prayer.
Let him kiss his wife goodbye.

Paris
Stay here. I will call him.
(to Priam)
It is my mother, and your wife.

(Priam turns to Paris.)

Priam
I cannot see her.
(he turns back to the altar again)

Hecuba
Changed and distraught.
(Paris comes to Hecuba.)

Paris
He prays.

Hecuba
Let him pray the Greeks will spare
your youngest brother, still a child,
when all the Trojan men and you are slain.
Enslaved in the Greek lands,
Hecuba will remember proud Troy.
(she goes)
Chorus (in the distance)
Ah, ah! Ah, ah!

Paris
Father, shall I go now
to defend my mother?
(Priam does not answer.)

Chorus (in the distance)
[18] Ah ha ha ha. Ah, ah, ah, ...

(Andromache comes.)
... Ah ha ha ha ha. Ah, ah, ah.

Andromache
Out of my way, adulterer,
that I may come to Priam.

Paris
I guard him as he prays.

Andromache
You will have need to guard him.
For though you killed Achilles –
(too late! too late!) –
Achilles' son is raging through the town
swinging my own dead child as club.
(Paris hides his face for a moment ...)

Chorus (in the distance)
Ah ha ha ha. Ah, ah, ah, ah.
(... then goes to Priam.)

Paris
It is my sister, and your son's wife.

Priam (turning to Paris)
I cannot see her.

Chorus (in the distance)
[19] Ah, ah!

*(Paris comes towards Andromache, but
she is already going, withdrawn and
dignified. She does not look at Helen, when
they pass, as Helen comes.)*

Paris
Helen.

Helen
Paris.

(There is a long embrace. They stand silent together, the beautiful ill-fated pair.)

Paris *(going to Priam at the altar)*
It is your daughter, and my wife.
It is Helen.

Priam *(turning to Paris)*
Go, my son, to find a hero's death
in burning Troy.
Let Helen come to me.

(Paris goes.)

Chorus *(in the distance)*
Ah! Ah!

Priam
Mysterious daughter, who are you?

Helen
I am Helen.

Priam
Have I been gentle with you?

Helen
Neither you nor Hector
ever by word or deed reproached me.

Priam
Why was that I wonder?
Why do I speak gently now
below the screams of the dying?

Chorus *(in the distance)*
Ah, ah, etc.

Helen
I cannot tell. I am Helen.

Priam
You loved Paris?
He is already dead.

Helen
Yes.

Chorus *(in the distance)*
Ah, ah, ah, ...

Priam
You will go back to Greece.

Helen
Yes.

Priam
For you are Helen.
(he kisses her, she goes)

Chorus *(in the distance)*
Ah, ah, ah, etc.

*(Priam sinks down before the altar
and tries to say something, but cannot be
heard. As his lips continue to move
soundlessly, Hermes appears as a God. Priam
lifts himself up.)*

Priam *(with closed eyes)*
I see mirrors, myriad upon myriad ...
moving ... the dark forms of creation.

*(Hermes descends to Hades ...
The Greeks burst in. Neoptolemus,
Achilles' son, runs his sword through
Priam who dies instantly. Everyone stock
still.)*

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Producers James Mallinson & Chris Hazell

Sound engineers James Lock, John Pellowe & David Frost

Editor Nigel Gayler

Recording venue Kingsway Hall; November 1980

Front cover King Priam begging Achilles for the return of Hector's body, 1824 by Alexander Ivanov (1806–58) (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow/Bridgeman Art Library, London)

Back cover Photo of Sir Michael Tippett (Hulton Deutsch)

Design Jaquetta Sergeant

Booklet typeset by Michael White-Robinson

Publisher Schott & Co.

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Chandos Records Ltd, Colchester, Essex, England

Printed in the EU

SOLOISTS/LONDON SINFONIETTA/ATHERTON

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Hector, their eldest sonThomas Allen
Andromache, Hector's wifeFelicity Palmer
Paris, Priam's second sonPhilip Langridge
Helen, wife to Menelaus of SpartaYvonne Minton
Achilles, a Greek heroRobert Tear
Patroclus, his friendStephen Roberts
NurseAnn Murray
Old ManDavid Wilson-Johnson
Young GuardPeter Hall
HermesKenneth Bowen
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Act II

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Act III

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